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ABSTRACT

Internal-external control is an important individual differences variable that was introduced in a systematic series of social learning studies by Rotter. The I-E dimension refers to the degree to which people view themselves as responsible for the occurrence or lack of occurrence of reinforcement (internals), as opposed to viewing luck, fate, chance, or powerful others as being responsible (externals). The present investigation was concerned primarily with how individual differences along the I-E dimension would relate to various reactions to others in need of assistance. Subjects were 146 male and female college students (66 externals and 69 internals). A number of situational manipulations were included in this investigation. Reaction was observed as the subjects were confronted with: (1) a Korean war veteran, (2) an ex-convict, and (3) a welfare client. The data were analyzed through a 2x2x3x4 ANOVA design. Results indicate that internals and externals do indeed differentially attribute responsibility for others' behavioral outcomes. Also, reactions to others needing assistance are mediated to some extent by subjective attribution of responsibility. (Author/HMV)

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Internal-External Control and Responses to Others Needing Assistance[1]

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Internal-external control is an important individual differences variable that was introduced in a systematic series of social learning studies by Rotter (1966). The I-E dimension refers to the degree to which people regard themselves as responsible for the occurrence or lack of occurrence of reinforcement (internals), as opposed to viewing luck, fate, chance, or powerful others as being responsible (externals). The present investigation was concerned primarily with how individual differences along the I-E dimension would relate to various reactions to others in need of assistance.

The major line of I-E research which relates to this study concerns relationships between I-E and the attribution of responsibility. Studies by Phares, Wilson, & Klyver (1971) and by Davis & Davis (1972) indicate that internals assume greater responsibility for their own failures than do externals. Phares, Wilson, & Klyver's data further indicate that this I-E effect is strongest in an ambiguous situation, i.e. when no situational factors may be clearly identified as the "cause" of poor performance. Phares & Wilson (1972), and Sosis (in press) have shown that internals and externals manifest similar differences in attributing responsibility for others' behaviors. However, Phares & Wilson were unable to demonstrate that the structure-ambiguity dimension (referred to hereafter sim-

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ply as "structure") interacted with I-E in a fashion similar to that obtained in the work just cited.

The major purpose of the present study was to further examine the possibility that internals, more than externals, see not only themselves, but also others as primarily responsible for their own behavior-reinforcement contingencies. If such is the case, it was hypothesized, then relative to externals, internals should respond to persons experiencing personal difficulty by regarding them as (1) less deserving of help, (2) less worthy of specific financial assistance, (3) less worthy of "understanding", and (4) less worthy of sympathy. By using several measures which seem intuitively to relate to responsibility attribution, we hoped to explore some of the correlates of such attributions as manifested in various assistance-related behaviors.

In the interest of breadth, a number of situational manipulations were included in this investigation. First, it was decided to observe the four responses specified above as they were directed toward (1) a Korean war veteran, (2) an ex-convict, and (3) a welfare client (hereafter referred to as the "stimulus figures"). Second, of the three case histories which each S received, one stimulus figure was presented in a way which indicated that he was very much responsible for his plight, another was described as being largely the victim of circumstance, and the third was described with no clear reference to locus of responsibility. This manipulation (referred to as description) constituted another attempt at locating the structure by I-E interaction which Phares & Wilson had been unable to demonstrate. Accordingly, it was predicted that I-E differences would be most pronounced with respect to the ambiguous description. Finally, half of the Ss were specifically requested to attribute responsibility to each stimulus figure prior to making the other four judgments, while the other half were

not so directed. This manipulation (referred to as "request-no request") was designed to investigate possible effects of inducing a responsibility attribution "set."

Method

Our sample consisted of 146 males and females drawn from several introductory psychology classes at Kansas State University. The mean and median I-E scores for this sample were 10.82 and 11, respectively. Using a median split, and eliminating all Ss at the median, there were 66 externals and 69 internals. Run in groups of from one to four, Ss were instructed that we were interested in their reactions to others who were having problems in living. In addition, request Ss were specifically asked to keep in mind the extent to which the person described was responsible for his own plight or situation.

For no request Ss, each of the three case histories was followed by the four response scales for help, money, understanding, and sympathy (p. 1 of handout). Request Ss received identical materials, with the exception that the responsibility scale (see bottom of p. 1) was inserted as question one. A cross sample of the materials used is provided on pages two, three, and four of the handout.

Both the particular stimulus figure-description combinations and the orders of their presentation were determined on a random basis, in an effort to minimize possible contaminating effects. Assignment of Ss to the request or no request condition was also determined on a random basis.

Upon completion of the three case histories, Ss were diverted for approximately 15 minutes through participation in another experiment. They were then administered the I-E scale, and dismissed.

Results and Discussion

The data were analyzed through a 2 X 2 X 3 X 4 ANOVA design, with repeated measures on two variables: descriptions and responses. Results of this analysis are provided in Table 1 (p. 5 of handout).

As can be seen in Table 1, no significant differences were obtained between request and no request Ss, nor did this manipulation interact with responses. The interaction of this variable with I-E did not reach an acceptable significance level. A comparison of means, however, suggested that the differences between internals and externals were attenuated in the request condition. While the obtained probability level for this interaction was .13, it does suggest the possibility that explicitly drawing attention to notions of responsibility creates an awareness on the part of both internals and externals of their respective attributional biases, resulting in a conscious effort to resist those biases in making subsequent decisions. Such an interpretation assumes that attributional decisions regarding others' behaviors are based to a large extent on what the attributor perceives as the consequences of his decisions for those others; an assumption which, as we shall see, other aspects of the data support.

As expected, large differences were obtained as a function of the descriptions of the stimulus figures. Since these descriptions were designed to vary with respect to the responsibility of the stimulus figure for his plight, the significance of this effect supports the notion that the response measures used reflect to some extent subjective attribution of responsibility. However, as a check on this assertion, the data were re-analyzed using the same ANOVA model as before, but substituting stimulus figures for descriptions as one of the repeated measures variables. Although no main effect for stimulus figures was obtained, there was a

significant stimulus-figure by response interaction, located primarily in responses on the money item to the ex-convict. Thus, although the dimension of responsibility was clearly a major source of response variation, other sources were present.

Table 1 also reflects the presence of an I-E main effect. As predicted, internals manifested significantly lower scores across the four measures than did externals. Figure 1 (p. 6 in handout) plots these results. Since the I-E construct by definition relates to the dimension of perceived locus of responsibility for behavioral outcomes, differences between internals and externals across these various measures further attests to the relationship between subjective attributions of responsibility and assistance-related responses. Viewed from this perspective, the relative reluctance of internals to sanction help, money, etc. for individuals encountering difficulty may be seen as supportive of the notion that internals, more than externals, perceive others as primarily responsible for behavioral outcomes.

It will be recalled that one hypothesis stated that I-E differences would be most pronounced in response to the ambiguous description. Reference to Table 1 indicates that the hypothesized I-E by description interaction did not materialize. Consistent with data reported by Phares & Wilson, the effect of locus of control was invariant across the descriptions employed.

The repeated demonstration of an I-E by structure interaction in studies dealing with attribution of responsibility for one's <u>own</u> behavior seems to suggest some qualitative difference between those situations and situations dealing with similar attributions for <u>another's</u> behavior.

It is quite possible that this difference lies in the engagement of differential goals in these two classes of situations. Phares, Wilson, &

Klyver and Davis & Davis interpret the I-E by structure interactions obtained in their studies in terms of the defensive characteristics of an external orientation. That is, the external, by attributing responsibility for his own failure to external factors in a situation where the objective cause of failure is unclear, retains the possibility of being viewed by others as competent (or at least not incompetent) in the task at hand. The individual is clearly focusing on the consequences of his attributional decisions for himself.

Situations requiring attribution of responsibility for another's behavior may be seen as engaging an entirely different goal. Phares & Wilson suggested that their failure to obtain the hypothesized I-E by structure interaction may have been due to the quasi-legal judgments involved. A valued ethic in the Americal legal structure is that one is innocent unless all reasonable doubt has been removed. Apparently, in such quasi-legal situations, where the locus of responsibility is left unclear, Ss simply will not commit themselves one way or the other. If such an explanation has merit, it would appear that, in attributing responsibility for others' behaviors, one tends to focus on the consequences of his decisions for those others. In these situations, the primary goal for the attributor appears to be satisfaction in the knowledge that he has attempted to formulate just and equitable decisions.

Of course, much of the foregoing is speculative. However, enough data is presently available to warrant consideration of this interpretation as the possible focus of future research. Of particular value would be studies utilizing non-student subjects. The reliance of the present interpretation on notions of equity in quasi-legal decisions may not be warranted in a less egalitarian population.

To this point, it has been contended that the response measures used

in this investigation reflect to an appreciable extent subjective attribution of responsibility. Table 1 indicates that both a significant response main effect and a description by response interaction were obtained. These findings suggest the presence of a fly in the ointment, as it were. In this instance, the three factor analyses summarized in Table 2 (p. 7 in handout) constituted our collective flyswatter. As it turned out, the fly appeared to be the understanding item. The help, money, and sympathy items showed consistently high loadings on the first -- and only -- factor extracted. In contrast, the loadings for the understanding item declined precipitously across descriptions. This item's low loading in the responsible description led us to suspect that its considerably higher loadings in the other two descriptions were artifactual. Post hoc, it occurred to us that this item was poorly worded for tapping the empathic kind of understanding which was our intent. It is noteworthy, however, that a complete re-analysis of the data eliminating this response did not alter any of the other previously-discussed findings.

In conclusion, the obtained I-E main effect substantiates earlier findings by Phares & Wilson and Sosis. It now seems clear that internals and externals do indeed differentially attribute responsibility for <u>others'</u> behavioral outcomes. Further, this I-E main effect, the description main effect, and the factor analyses all provide evidence that reactions to others needing assistance are mediated to some extent by subjective attribution of responsibility.

The major questions raised by this research appear to be the following:

(1) Is it feasible to assume that in formulating decisions concerning the granting of assistance to individuals in need, people are generally desirous of formulating just and equitable decisions? Empirical support for this assumption would be useful in explaining

both the possible request-no request by I-E interaction, and the absence of an I-E by description interaction in the present study.

(2) What dimensions other than subjective attribution of responsibility are systematically mediating decisions regarding help, money, understanding, and sympathy? Research directed at this question might prove quite useful in understanding the dynamics of decisions made daily by social workers, VA claims officers, and others in related professions.

Table 1

Analysis of Variance Summary Table

Source	SS	df	Ms	F	p
Total	4804.24	1619	2.96		
Between	756.91	134	5.64		
I-E	32.16	1	32.16	5.93	<.05
R-N	0.30	1	0.30	0.05	
I-E x R-N	12.84	1	12.84	2.37	.13
Error	709.73	131	5.41		
Within	4047.33	1485	2.72		
DS	1154.43	2	557.21	138.53	< .05
I-E x DS	10.24	2	5.12	1.22	
R-N x DS	8.34	2	4.17	1.00	
I-E x R-N x DS	0.77	2	0.38	0.09	
Error	1091.66	262	4.16		
RS	51.83	3	17.27	8.88	< .05
I-E x RS	5.85	3	1.95	1.00	
R-N x RS	2.13	3	0.71	0.36	
I-E x R-N x RS	5.21	3	1.73	0.89	
Error	764.47	393	1.94		
DS x RS	96.44	6	16.07	15.32	< .05
I-E x DS x RS	5.87	6	0.97	0.93	
R-N x DS x RS	5.24	6	0.87	0.83	
I-E x R-N x DS x RS	5.73	6	0.95	0.91	
Error	824.59	786	1.04		

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Figure 1

Mean Responses of Internals and Externals

to Stimulus Figures as a Function of Descriptions

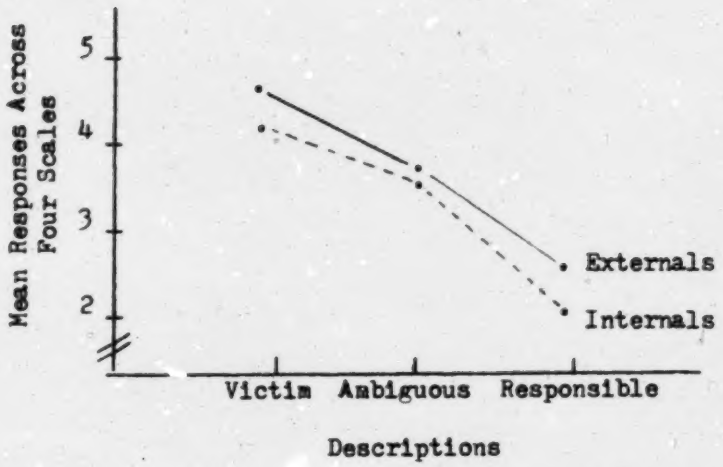

Table 2

First-Factor Loadings of Response Scales

Across Descriptions

	Descriptions		
Responses	Victim	Ambiguous	Responsible
Help	.62	.80	.82
Money	.81	.84	.78
Understanding	.76	.60	.14
Sympathy	.76	.84	.81
Pct. Var. Acc't. for	59%	60%	49%

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